



Endangered Timber Rattlesnake Conservation Includes Introduction on Quabbin Island

The Timber Rattlesnake is listed as an Endangered Species in Massachusetts and has experienced the greatest modern decline of any native reptile. It is a high conservation priority species for the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, (MassWildlife) the agency with the legal responsibility and mandate to conserve endangered and common wildlife species. Currently, there are only five populations of Timber Rattlesnakes in the Commonwealth. As part of an overall conservation strategy, MassWildlife is proposing to establish a small number of rattlesnakes on Mount Zion, a large island closed to the public at the Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts.

Native to Massachusetts, the Timber Rattlesnake has lived here continuously long before European settlement. Humans are the greatest threat to the Timber Rattlesnake. While killing or disturbing this snake is a serious criminal offense, these acts, combined with road mortality, continue to be major factors that contribute to the rattlesnake's imperiled status. The proposal to establish a small discrete population of Timber Rattlesnakes at the Quabbin Reservoir has evolved out of the need to have at least one location in Massachusetts where this native endangered species will avoid people.



Snakes used for this project will be offspring of Massachusetts snakes. Juvenile snakes will be headstarted in captivity by the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, RI for two winters allowing them to grow large enough so that they will have the best chance of surviving to adulthood. While rattlesnakes are perfectly good swimmers, this island is large enough that they would have little motivation to swim away. Even if the snakes did swim, they would pose no measurable risk to the public, considering rattlesnakes have long lived in popular state parks and wildlife lands heavily used by people elsewhere in Massachusetts.

Throughout human history, snakes of all types have been feared, maligned, and persecuted. Because the Timber Rattlesnake is venomous, people express understandable concerns for their safety and the safety of family members and pets. As a venomous snake, the Timber Rattlesnake certainly has the potential to be dangerous, but the reality is that there has been no public harm. Timber Rattlesnakes are generally mild in disposition and often rattle their tails to alert animals and people. Wild bites to people (who don't deliberately handle or disturb a rattlesnake) are extremely rare. Most modern bites occur as the result of irresponsible (and illegal) activities that involve handling or harassing the animals. The latest antivenin treatments have greatly reduced the danger even if a person is bitten.

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the agency with the legal mandate and scientific expertise is working hard to ensure that this imperiled and fascinating snake does not finally disappear almost 400 years after European settlement.

**Learn more: Mass.gov/dfw/timber-rattlesnake-conservation
Mass.gov/dfw/timber-rattlesnake-facts**

The Timber Rattlesnake in Massachusetts History



The Timber Rattlesnake figures prominently in the Commonwealth's early history as a symbol of strength. In 1622, Chief Canonicus of the Narragansetts sent arrows bound in a rattlesnake skin (likely from the Blue Hills) to Governor Winthrop as a challenge for war. The Governor returned the rattlesnake skin filled with powder and shot with a message of defiance. The familiar Gadsden Flag with a coiled Timber Rattlesnake and the words "DON'T TREAD ON ME" was designed in 1775 for use in the American Revolution and was later used by the Continental Marines.

www.mass.gov/masswildlife

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

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